

# Eco- Friendly Tourism in Kuttanad: Scope and Opportunities

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## Abstract

Tor every economy tourism plays a very significant role in its contribution to nations GDP. In India the contribution of Foreign Exchange Earnings (FEEs) in 2018 was Rs. 194882 Crore. The largest revenue from tourism is for the state Tamil Nadu. In Kerala Foreign Exchange Earnings (FEEs) in 2018 was Rs. 8764.46 Crore. The revenue of Kerala from tourism is Rs 36258.01 crores, that increased by 8.61% from 2017. The great tourist attraction in Kerala are the canals, hills, vallies and plains. Kuttanad is a place with unique features. It lies below the sea level. For the same reason throughout the year the place is always flooded with water. The modern techniques adopted in this area help the farmers to reap a good crop especially paddy and coconut.

Kuttanad is a great tourist centre in Kerala. Tourist can enjoy the peculiar scenery and beauty of the place. The place attracts the tourist especially for boating in the lakes. Paddy cultivation gives different types of scenery at its different stages of growth. The food items in this region is another attraction to the tourist. The place is famous for duck rearing. Varieties of fishes are available in this area along with eggs of dugs and its meat. There is also availability of fresh coconut toddy in this region. Private individuals also provide house boats to tourist on rent. All such factors promote tourism in this region.

Earnings from tourism makes a livelihood for the people of the area. Government provides more facilities to the tourists so that they can have safe tourism. There is much risk and uncertainty concerned with private houseboats. There must be a good and efficient machinery in coordinating the services provided by the private agencies and also the government agencies. Similarly the government must control the hospitals and restaurants so that tourist are not exploited by the private agencies.

**Keywords: Tourism, Foreign Tourist, Domestic Tourist, Eco- Friendly, Ecology, Kettuvallam, Backwaters, Duck rearing, Pollution, paddy cultivation**

## 1. Introduction

Kerala, the greenest state, is on the southernmost tip of India. Kerala is popularly known as 'Gods Own Country' in the tourism circles. It is one of the most popular tourist destinations in the country, named as one of the ten paradises of the world by National Geographic Traveler<sup>2</sup>.

Kerala is famous especially for its eco-friendly destinations in India, The land of coconuts, beautiful backwaters, beautiful beaches, rich culture, sumptuous food, natural diversity, ancient temple and blessed with excellent tropical weather and networked by 44 rivers, 34 lakes, canals, ponds, and paddy fields, is now at the first spot in the top 20 global trending destinations for 2020, as per a survey by a popular online marketplace for travellers. Kerala is already favored by many tourists from India and abroad due to its natural diversity. Growing at a rate of 13.31%, the tourism<sup>3</sup> industry is a major contributor to the state's economy.<sup>4</sup>

Share of Top 10 States/UTs of India in Number of Foreign Tourist Visits in 2018 (revised) is explained in the table below. Kerala is in the 8<sup>th</sup> position.

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<sup>2</sup> "Kerala Tourism: Paradises in the world". The Hindu. Retrieved 20 February 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Tourism: The activities of persons travelling to and in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes.

<sup>4</sup> "Tourist statistics for Kerala" (PDF). Tourism Statistics and Ipu. Kerala Tourism Development Corporation. Archived from the original (PDF) on 1 July 2006. Retrieved 9 August 2006.

**Table 1. Share of Top 10 States/UTs of India in Number of Foreign Tourist Visits in 2018**

Rank	State/UT	Foreign Tourist Visits in 2018	
		Number	Percentage Share (%)
1	Tamil Nadu	6074345	21.0
2	Maharashtra	5078514	17.6
3	Uttar Pradesh	3780752	13.1
4	Delhi	2740502	9.5
5	Rajasthan	1754348	6.1
6	West Bengal	1617105	5.6
7	Punjab	1200969	4.2
8	Kerala	1096407	3.8
9	Bihar	1087971	3.8
10	Goa	933841	3.2
Total of Top 10		25364754	87.9
Others		3507630	12.1
Total		28872384	100.0

Source: State/ UT Tourism Departments.

\* Figure for the year 2017 has been repeated in the year 2018

The main tourism agenda for the state is promoting ecologically sustained tourism, which focuses on the local culture, wilderness adventures, volunteering and personal growth of the local population. Efforts are taken to minimize the adverse effects of traditional tourism on the natural environment, and enhance the cultural integrity of local people.

### 1.1 Kerala Tourist Statistics 2018

Kerala is an established destination for both domestic as well as foreign tourists. Kerala is a leader in India when it comes to destination management, tourism promotion as well as tourist arrivals. The statistics are as shown below:

#### a. Foreign Tourists

Foreign tourists are people visiting India on a foreign passport. They stay at least twenty four hours in the country. The purpose of their journey can be classified as follows.

- (i) Leisure
- (ii) Business

The following are not regarded as 'foreign tourists'

- (i) Persons arriving with or without a contract, to take up an occupation or engage in activities. They receive remuneration from within the country
- (ii) Persons coming to live in the country
- (iii) Temporary visitors staying less than twenty four hours in the country (SAME DAY VISITORS)

**Table 2. Details of Foreign Tourists**

No. of Foreign Tourists in 2018	1096407
No. of Foreign Tourists in 2017	1091870
% Variation over Previous Year	0.42%
Foreign Exchange Earnings 2018	Rs. 8764.46 crores
Foreign Exchange Earnings 2017	Rs. 8392.11 crores
% Variation over Previous Year	4.44%

\*Source – India Tourism official website, India Tourism Statistics 2017

### b. Domestic Tourists

Domestic tourists are people who travel within the country to a place other than their usual place of residence. They stay at hotels or other accommodation establishments run on commercial basis for a duration of not less than 24 hours or one night. Their purpose of travel may be classified as

- i) Pleasure
- ii) Religious pilgrimage
- iii) Business
- iv) Study
- v) Health

**Table 3. Details of Domestic Tourists**

No. of Domestic Tourists in 2018	15604661
No. of Domestic Tourists in 2017	14673520
% Variation over Previous Year	6.35%
Total Revenue Generated in 2018 (Direct and Indirect)	Rs.36258.01 crores
Total Revenue Generated in 2017 (Direct and Indirect)	Rs.33383.68 crores
% Variation over Previous Year -	8.61%

\*Source – India Tourism official website, India Tourism Statistics 2017

Kerala is well known for its beaches, backwaters in Alappuzha and Kollam, mountain ranges and wildlife sanctuaries. Other popular attractions in the state include

- ✚ the beaches at Kovalam, Varkala, Kollam and Kappad;
- ✚ backwater tourism and lake resorts around Ashtamudi Lake, Kollam ;
- ✚ hill stations and resorts at Munnar, Wayanad, Nelliampathi, Vagamon and Ponmudi;
- ✚ national parks and wildlife sanctuaries at Periyar, Parambikulam and Eravikulam.
- ✚ The Heritage sites, such as the Padmanabhapuram Palace, Hill Palace, and Mattancherry Palace.
- ✚ To further promote tourism in Kerala, the Grand Kerala Shopping Festival was started by the Government of Kerala in 2007. Since then it has been held every year during the December–January period.

### 1.2 District-wise Foreign & Domestic Tourist Arrivals during 2018

- Ernakulam district recorded the maximum Foreign Tourist Arrivals.
- Pathanamthitta district recorded the least number.
- Kasaragod district recorded the maximum increase in the percentage of Foreign Tourist Arrivals (269.69%) over the previous year.
- In Domestic Tourist Arrivals, Ernakulam district recorded the maximum footfall followed by Thiruvananthapuram which holds the second position and Thrissur district in the third position.

**Table 4. District-wise Foreign & Domestic Tourist Arrivals during 2018**

Sl. No	District	Foreign			Domestic		
		2018	2017	% variation over 2017	2018	2017	% variation over 2017
1	Thiruvananthapuram	342761	420719	-18.53	2712387	2505333	8.26
2	Kollam	9086	6227	45.91	400222	381829	4.82

3	Pathanamthitta	1953	2003	-2.5	192813	164494	17.22
4	Alappuzha	95522	75037	27.3	511490	433456	18.00
5	Kottayam	43287	32350	33.81	524821	468593	12.00
6	Idukki	44833	42285	6.03	1257403	1090086	15.35
7	Ernakulam	488175	453973	7.53	3446889	3285088	4.93
8	Thrissur	11333	10775	5.18	2497278	2642546	5.50
9	Palakkad	1967	1711	14.96	509883	474180	7.53
10	Malappuram	17610	18451	-4.56	565914	520832	8.66
11	Kozhikode	18388	13106	40.3	1052783	932345	12.92
12	Wayanad	11607	8995	29.04	888141	815624	8.89
13	Kannur	5763	5123	12.49	768038	695655	10.41
14	Kasaragod	4122	1115	269.69	276599	263459	4.99
Kerala		1096407	1091870	0.42	15604661	14673520	6.35

Source: Government of Kerala,(2018), 'Kerala Tourism Statistics 2018', Research and Statistics Division, Department of Tourism

## 2. Kuttanad Tourism

Kuttanad is a region covering Alappuzha, Kottayam and Pathanamthitta districts, in the state of Kerala, India. It has the largest below sea level paddy cultivation in the world [P.M. Thomas, 2002; T. A. Thomas, 2010; Anilkumar, 2012]. The major occupation in Kuttanad is farming, rice being the staple crop.

Kuttanad is a backwater paradise and an ideal destination for a backwater cruise in Kerala. This type of topology facilitates infinite employment opportunities related to agricultural activities and tourism, which can lead to overall development of the region [Government of Kerala, 2006].

### 2.1 Ecological significance of Kuttanad

Kuttanad, a low lying, backwater region on the southwest coast of Kerala, situated 9<sup>o</sup>17' to 9<sup>o</sup>40' N latitude and 76<sup>o</sup>19' to 76<sup>o</sup>33' E longitude extending over 874 sq. kilometers. Out of this, 490 sq. kilometers, which is 0.5 to 2 meters below Mean Sea Level (MSL), are under paddy cultivation and this area is known as *punja* lands. These polders reclaimed from *Kayal* area with an outer or ring bund are made into cluster of fields called '*Padasekharams*', (*paddy fields in Kuttanad is known as 'Padasekharams'*). 304 sq. kilometers are under garden land or dry land, located 1 meter above MSL [KSSP, 1978; Jose George, 1984 and K. A. Sreejith, 2013]. The garden land is mainly used for coconut cultivation and human habitation. The rest, about 80 sq. kilometers are covered by the Vembanad Lake and various water courses including rivers, lakes, canals etc. [The Report of Kuttanad Enquiry Commission (K.E.C), 1971 and A.V. Jose, 1976]. Kuttanad wet land is divided into six agro-ecological zones such as *Kayal Land, Lower Kuttanad, Upper Kuttanad, North Kuttanad, Purakadu Kari and Vaikom Kari*. [Prakash Pillai R, 2015].

Four important rivers of Kerala, namely Meenachil, Pamba, Manimala, and Achenkovil flows through this region. Also backwaters, canals and stream networks were extended over this region. Vembanad Lake is Kerala's largest backwater lake<sup>5</sup> [K.G. Padmakumar, 2006]. Rivers Pamba and Meenachil drain into the Vembanad Lake [A. C. Mathew Edayady, 2002 and P. M. Thomas 2002].

The region experiences warm climate with fairly uniform temperature throughout the year ranging from 21<sup>o</sup>C -36<sup>o</sup>C. Humidity is very high in this region. The Annual rainfall in this region is about 3,000mm.

<sup>5</sup> The Vembanad Lake, the most important of the West Coast Canal System has a length of 84 km. and an average breadth of 3.1 km. It covers an area of 204 sq.km. stretching from Alappuzha to Kochi. It borders Cherthala, Ambalappuzha and Kuttanad Taluks of Alappuzha District, Kottayam, Vaikom and Changanassery Taluks of Kottayam District, Kochi and Kanayannur Taluks of Ernakulam District. The Pamba, the Achancovil, the Manimala, the Meenachil and the Muvattupuzha Rivers discharge into this lake.

South-west monsoon contributes 60percent of rain (May-August) and 30 percent rain is received during north east-monsoon (October-November) [G.O.K., 1974, K. A. Sreejith, 2013].

There is no recorded history on the origin of the place Kuttanad. Kuttanad was once known as *Chuttanad*. This area was once highly forested. It is believed that this area was burnt down by forest fires. Hence it was known as *Chuttanad* (which means burnt land in colloquial language). By the passage of time *Chuttanad* came to be known as Kuttanad<sup>6</sup>[A. C. Mathew Edayady, 2002].

## 2.2 Distribution of Tourist

### a. Destination-Wise Foreign Tourist Arrivals – 2018.

Sl.	No. Destination	No. of Tourists
1	Kochi City	236870
2	Kovalam	142914
3	Fort Kochi	115482
4	Varkala	103602
5	Alappuzha	746213
18	Kuttanadu	6211

Source: Government of Kerala, 2018

### b. Domestic Tourist Visits to Destinations - 2017 & 2018

Destinations	No. of Tourists (2018)	No. of Tourists (2017)
Kochi City	2510623	2305627
Guruvayoor	2018344	2138632
Thiruvananthapuram	1392314	1217446
Alappuzha	399231	328250
Kuttanadu	63439	58260

Source: Government of Kerala, 2018

## 2.3 Important Tourism activities in Kuttanad

Kuttanad is an attractive place due to its gorgeous beauty. The beautiful scenery of different rivers, kayals, beaches, backwaters, boat races and very vast area of paddy fields create a fantastic picture of Kuttanad. *Kettuvallams* made for the tourists are the main attraction. The main attractive places in Kuttanad are explained here and also some pictures are used for explain its beauty.

### 1. *Kettuvallem*:

Travel on *Kettuvallem* is an amazing experience for the tourists. Large number of domestic and foreign visitors came here for spending time on *Kettuvallem*. It will provides entertainment and different varieties of food items. This activity is an important business in Kuttanad. *Kettuvallem* is just a moving home. There are spacious bedrooms with large beds and suites , as well as a personal chef, driver and assistant to guide the way.

<sup>6</sup> Upon digging some places in Kuttanad people came across remains of decayed trees. These trees are known as '*kandamaram*' and they are centuries old. In Ramankarry a person called Ravindran, came across a huge decayed tree while digging the foundation for his new home. The tree was so large that its ends couldn't be discovered. These trees are useless. They give out a foul smell when burnt



## 2. Paddy Fields:

The paddy fields in Kuttanad present three fantastic views. At the time of dewatering the fields are fully submerged in water. A few weeks after paddy seeds are sown the paddy fields present a different view. Finally at the time of harvesting the sight of matured paddy crops swaying in the breeze is a very beautiful sight.



## 3. Punnamada Nehru Trophy Boat Race<sup>7</sup>:



<sup>7</sup> The Nehru Trophy Boat Race was instituted by the then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru in the year 1952, on being thrilled by the enchanting beauty of the racing snake shaped boats. Ever since, the race is being conducted at the time of Onam festival on second Saturday of August every year. Various cultural programmes are also conducted along with the race, creating a festive mood in the town. Thousands of tourists from all over the world flock in, to have a glimpse at this spectacular occasion.

Both domestic and international tourists are attracted by the beauty of Kuttanad. Lot of visitors arrive for the Punnamada Nehru Trophy Boat Race.

Tourism creates more employment opportunities, increases income and standard of living.

#### 4. Kuttanadan taste

In Alappuzha district large areas covering different water bodies like four major rivers Meenachil, Pamba, Manimala, Achenkovil, Arabian Sea, the Vembanad and Kayamkulam backwaters, lakes, canals, lot of ponds etc, are present in this region. Different varieties of fish are found these water bodies. The Vembanad lake and allied water body measuring about 13,000 ha has several species of fishes. The benefit of huge wealth of marine and inland fishing is available here. Both brackish water fish farming and fresh water fish farming are done in the district. So there is lot of work in this field. Hence large number of people depends on this sector for living.



Oil Sardines, Prawns, Mackerel, Anchoviella, Other Sardines, etc., are the major species of economic importance and Lobsters, Elarmo branches, Scienids, Catfishes, Pomfrets, Leiognathus, etc., are the other kinds of fish that land on the coast (Swaminathan, M.S., 2007; G.O.I. Census, 2011). These resources are exported to other countries also. So this creates additional employment opportunities. Capture of fishes from various water bodies is a major source of livelihood for the people of Kuttanad. Both foreign and domestic tourist are very interested to doing this activity. .

Most important work in Kuttanad is hotel business. Large amount of big and small hotels are concentrated here. Hotels function under highly competitive atmosphere. In their menu they give special importance to Kuttanadan cuisine. For the proper functioning of these hotels, large amount of linkage firms are needed. So the functioning of these hotels has helped the growth of activities like duck farming, fish rearing, toddy tapping etc. It is a source of employment for a large number of people.

Toddy tapping from coconut trees is another source of livelihood of the people in Kuttanad. We can see large number of toddy shops in Kuttanad region. It has generated employment opportunities for many people.

## 5. Duck rearing

Another important business in the land of Kuttanad is duck rearing. Duck farmers are the poorest section among farmers in Kuttanad. They sell duck eggs and meat. Famous varieties of duck in Kuttanad are *Chara* and *Chempale*. Kuttanad has highest number of ducks in the State. Because its perfect condition is allows potential for duck farming in a gifted way. Government introduced expansion of Niranam hatchery with 15 extra hatchery sheds. It also provided facility for transportation of chicks to different parts of Kuttanad. So this activity is also attract the tourist.



## 6. Kuttanad Backwaters:

Kerala's backwaters for cruises over 85 km from Quilon to Alleppey and Cochin along the placid palm fringed waterways are immensely famous. Alappuzha is set amidst modest canals and backwater channels. Therefore, it is called Venice of East.



Enjoy the Kerala backwaters trip in India's longest altitude at Kuttanad. The landscape at Kuttanad will show adorable image full of amazing paddy fields and twisty canals surrounded by beautiful hill and sea.

## 3. Ecological damages

Here I am paying attention to some important ecological problems due to activities related to tourism in Kuttanad. The main reason for the damage of ecology in Kuttanad is due to the increasing use of houseboats.

### i. Houseboat tourism

Houseboat tourism is affecting the environment and ecology of the Vembanad Kayal. The pollution from the houseboats is the sewage from toilets, oil from engines, food wastes and plastic wastes. Emissions and oil leakage from the engines of house boats. And also plastic and other inorganic wastes dumped from house boats.

### ii. Pollution

India is trying to achieve rapid economic development without adequately managing the environment. Recently pollution loads has increased beyond the carrying capacity of the environment (Nelliyaat Prakash, 2018 and Swaminathen M.S., 2007). Pollution impacts ecosystem and related economic activity like



tourism. It means the negative impact caused by manmade deeds on nature. Pollution mainly affects land, water and air.

**a. Water Pollution-** Water is polluted mainly due to the addition of organic wastes, solid wastes and sewage, coir retting, fuel contamination from mechanized boats. Excessive use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides contaminate the lake ecosystem (Padmanabhan, P. G. and et.al , 2001 and Swaminathen M.S., 2007). Among rivers, the Pampa is the major contributor of solid pollutants<sup>8</sup>. Hanging latrines also contribute a share to water pollution (Kumar M. Ajith, 1996). Kuttanad is a great tourist attraction centre in India (Sreejith K. A. 2013). The tourist department and private individuals now provide house boating through the water ways. As a result of influx of tourist waste management has become a problem. The uses of houseboats have resulted in the overthrow of inorganic waste in to the water ways being accumulated in backwaters (Swaminathen M.S., 2007).

**b. Land Pollution-** The increased entrance of visitors/ tourists did not dispose their solid waste properly. It led to increasing pollution(Chen Jen-Hshuan, 2006). It also negatively affected the living conditions of the people.

**c. Air Pollution-** The smoke from house boat causes air pollution in this region. And also air pollution cause climate change.

The economic loss due to pollution includes cost of treatment and wage loss during sickness (Nelliyat Prakash, 2018).

### iii. Reduce the availability of Fisheries resources

Most aggravating among the region's problems is the severe degradation of the aquatic environment mainly caused by human intervention leading to depletion of fisheries resources and health hazards posed to the population.

### iv. Conversion of land

Illegal conversion and encroachment of water body is visible in areas where tourism has developed. Thousands of hectares of water body has been converted to land over past 150 years.

## 4. Findings of the study

Tourism is an important source of generation of income. So every country should take the responsibility to promote tourism. Here I am discussing about conditions to improve the facilities for tourists

1. Foreign tourists are very particular hygiene. So the authorities should give more importance to their safety and hygiene.
2. Another difficulty faced by them are the presence of middlemen, who are present at all levels. This menace is getting worse by the day. Demands have been made to control and keep a watch over such people.
3. Majority of them are preferring homely stay. Government officials give guidelines regarding the functioning of home stays are issued regularly and inspections are also conducted alongside.

### Other findings are

4. Foreign tourist arrivals to Kerala during the year 2018 is 1096407 showing an increase of 0.42% over the previous year.

<sup>8</sup> India Water Portal, October 2011, Pollution of the Pampa River, a major environmental issue for the Central Travancore and Kuttanad regions of Kerala.

5. Domestic Tourist arrival to Kerala during the year 2018 is 15604661 showing an increase of 6.35% over the previous year.
6. Foreign Exchange earnings for the year 2018 is Rs. 8764.46 Crores which recorded a growth of 4.44% over the previous year.
7. The city of Kochi ranks first in the total number of international and domestic tourists in Kerala.
8. Total Revenue (direct & indirect ) from Tourism during 2018 is Rs.36258.01 Crores, showing an increase of 8.61% over the last year's figure.
9. Considering the district-wise Domestic Tourist Arrivals, Alappuzha district shows the highest variation of 18.00% over 2017.

## 5. Conclusion of the study

Kerala is one of the best tourist centers in India and many foreigners visit our country especially Kerala. Kerala is famous for its backwaters and forty four rivers. Compared with other states , Kerala is having the facility of boating especially in Kuttanad. Kuttanad is famous for its scenic beauty. The place is almost covered with water throughout the year as it is a low lying area when compared with other regions.

The region is famous for paddy cultivation and the different stages of its cultivation give different scenic beauty. During the sowing season throughout the region it is covered with water. As paddy grows the region is a granary one. And by the harvesting season the place is covered with a golden yellowish colour.

The tourist can enjoy different varieties of food items especially coconut toddy, varieties of fish and other sea food items obtained from the lakes. Such food items are not available fresh in other parts of the country.

During certain months the place is famous for boat race. It is also another attraction to tourist. Tourist can have an entirely different eco system, climatic conditions and they can even live in water for weeks in the rented house boats. Hence, I conclude by saying that the uniqueness of the place echoes by the saying that Kerala is “Gods Own Country.”

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